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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 001840

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: DRC ELECTIONS UPDATE: ALMOST 20 MILLION VOTERS
REGISTERED

REF: KINSHASA 1795

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

1. (U) The Independent Election Commission (CEI) has released the latest round of figures of voter registration in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Total enrollment through November 4 has surpassed 19.9 million. Enrollment figures by province are as follows: Kinshasa (2,963,101); Bas Congo (1,232,416); Province Orientale (3,240,121); Katanga (3,363,987); Kasai Occidental (1,938,574); Kasai Oriental (1,854,491); North Kivu (2,068,591); South Kivu (1,350,883); Maniema (589,922); Equateur (769,346); and Bandundu (580,672).

2. (SBU) CEI operations have accelerated during the past week in Equateur and Bandundu, where the opening of registration centers had been delayed for lack of equipment and logistical difficulties. As of November 4, CEI reports that 859 of the planned 965 centers have opened in Equateur, while 649 of the 979 planned centers in Bandundu are operating. The opening of over 450 centers in the past week in these two provinces should result in an increased level of voter registration, where original estimates predicted approximately 6 million eligible voters. Operations in Equateur and Bandundu will continue until November 30.

3. (U) The CEI has also announced efforts to prevent further delays in the enrollment process. As reported in reftel, several security problems have arisen due to non-payment of election workers. To alleviate this problem, the CEI has retained a private bank in Kinshasa to begin paying directly those workers in the coming weeks. In addition, the CEI has sent this week to Equateur and Bandundu additional manpower and resources, including several motorboats to transport election kits on the river systems.

4. (U) The CEI also began November 1 the deployment of election kits for the constitutional referendum, scheduled to be held December 18. These kits include material such as ballot boxes, voting booths and training manuals for elections agents. These materials are being deployed, with the assistance of MONUC, to all the major cities in the country's 11 provinces. CEI officials say the distribution will continue until November 19 in order to reach the planned 40,000 voting locations.

5. (C) Comment: Enrollment operations are steadily progressing and the CEI finally appears to be overcoming at least some of the logistical obstacles in Equateur and Bandundu provinces. However, many Congolese, especially those in the eastern part of the country, are unaware of the coming referendum. Reports from the Kivus this week, as well as editorial cartoons in Kinshasa newspapers, indicate a general ignorance of what the December 18 referendum is about. The CEI, as well as members of Parliament and the GDRC, have as yet done an inadequate job of fully explaining and promoting the upcoming vote, which could jeopardize its passage.

6. (C) In addition, the draft electoral law, which must be passed by Parliament after the December 18 referendum, but before the national elections in 2006, has not yet been sent to that body for its consideration. The Council of Ministers approved its version of the draft law October 25, but controversial elements remain in the draft law which might not be accepted in Parliament. For example, the draft includes a controversial provision for the appointment of "Senators for Life," which is intended to provide a government position to senior officials who may lose during next year's elections. Delays in the electoral law's transmission to Parliament shortens the timeline for adoption of the law and for preparations for national elections, the first round of which is currently scheduled for the end of March 2006. End Comment.

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